



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

Residents and dignitaries gathered at the Flaming Fountain in Pierre on Monday, for the annual *Wreaths Across America* ceremony.

Keynote speaker for the 12th annual ceremony was Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG Adjutant General. Pastor John Fette provided the invocation, Erin Grossenburg of Winner sang the National Anthem, and Justin Nelson, president of the SD Funeral Directors Association served as emcee.



Wreaths Across America's mission is to remember, honor, and teach. Remember the fallen, honor those who served and are currently serving including their families who sacrifice, and teach our children the cost of freedom we enjoy each day.

To learn more about this great program visit: www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org.

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Merry Christmas to ALL our troops...especially those who cannot be home for Christmas! Merry Christmas to ALL the spouses and especially the children who won't get to be with their loved ones for Christmas!

VA ANNOUNCES NEW VETERANS HEALTH APPLICATION PROGRAMMING INTERFACE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently launched its first Health Application Programming Interface (API) that will power the next generation of [Blue Button](#) features by enabling veterans to interact with their own personal health data within innovative mobile and web-based apps.

Introduced on Dec. 4, at the White House Executive Forum on Healthcare Data Interoperability, Health APIs will power the next generation of Blue Button features by enabling veterans to interact with their own personal health data within innovative mobile and web-based apps.

Sponsored by the White House Office of American Innovation, the forum brought together senior health care leaders from both the public and private sectors.

Health APIs will also support new clinician-focused applications, and can also serve as a foundation for data sharing between health systems to support Veteran care.



“We are excited to announce this advancement in the way we deliver services,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Healthcare data interoperability plays a key role in all four of the VA’s top priorities, from implementing the MISSION Act and modernizing our electronic health record, to transforming our business systems and delivering better customer service. The VA is proud to serve as a leader and example in this field.”

Consistent with [VA’s Open API Pledge](#), the Health API conforms to the [Argonaut Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources \(FHIR\)](#) API standards. The VA believes that open FHIR-based APIs are an essential component in a modern interoperability strategy, and that government and industry must collaborate to expand available FHIR resources and its use.

The VA is committed to leveraging APIs to accelerate creation of transformational digital tools to support veterans as they engage with the VA’s core health, benefits and memorial services. Since launching its [Lighthouse API Management Platform](#) in March, the VA has delivered a developer portal, a Benefits Intake API and a Facilities API.

The VA continues to provide veteran patients easy digital access to their own health care data. Since the launch of the Blue Button product in 2010, more than 2 million veterans have downloaded over 32 million personal health data files from the VA’s patient portal.

For more information on the Veterans Health API, please visit <https://developer.va.gov>.

HOLIDAY WREATH-LAYING TO HONOR VETERANS

The Black Hills National Cemetery and the Hot Springs National Cemetery will host *Wreaths Across America*, an annual holiday wreath-laying ceremony to honor and remember our nation's veterans. Crazy Horse Civil Air Patrol, Veterans Service Organizations, the Knights of Columbus, and citizens are coordinating the event to honor veterans of each branch of the military, the Merchant Marine, as well as Prisoners of War and those still Missing in Action (POW/MIA).

The ceremony in Hot Springs (401 N. 4th Street) will be held Saturday, December 15, at 10:00 am (MT).

The ceremony at BHNC in Sturgis (20901 Pleasant Valley Drive) will be held Saturday, December 15, at 10:00 am (MT).



VA UPDATES RATING SCHEDULES

Effective Dec. 9, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) updated portions of the [VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities](#) (VASRD or Rating Schedule) that evaluates the hematologic and lymphatic systems.

These federal regulations used by the Veterans Benefits Administration help claims processors evaluate the severity of disabilities and assign disability ratings.

“Our goal is to provide veterans with the best possible customer service,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “When providing benefits, that means ensuring our benefits delivery is in line with current medical analysis.”

One diagnostic code was removed, nine were added, and several were restructured. The complete list of updates to the rating schedule are now available [online](#). Claims pending prior to Dec. 9, will be considered under both the old and new rating criteria, and whichever criteria is more favorable to the veteran will be applied. Claims filed on or after Dec. 9 will be rated under the new rating schedule.

By updating the rating schedule for conditions related to the hematologic and lymphatic systems, the VA claims processors can make more consistent decisions with greater ease and ensure veterans understand these decisions. The VA remains committed to improving its service to veterans continuously and staying at the forefront of modern medicine as it has for decades.

The VA has issued several VASRD updates since September 2017, including updates for [dental and oral conditions](#), [conditions related to the endocrine system](#), [gynecological conditions and disorders of the breast](#) [diseases of the eye](#) and [skin conditions](#).

PENNINGTON COUNTY EXPANDS THEIR VSO TEAM

Pennington County has expanded their veterans service office to include three veterans services officers. Allan Taylor is the newest member to their team. He can be reached at: allan.taylor@pennco.org.

Allan was born August 9, 1963, in Chelmsford, England while his father was serving an overseas assignment in the United States Air Force. He spent his childhood and was raised in the upper peninsula of Michigan, graduating from Gwinn High School, Gwinn, Michigan in 1981.

After High School, Allan entered the United States Air Force in 1982, as an Aircraft Maintenance Specialist. Allan served 24 years in the Air Force, and retired in 2006, at the highest enlisted grade of Chief Master Sergeant. His duty assignment locations include RAF Mildenhall, England, Minot AFB, ND and Ellsworth AFB, SD and many overseas temporary duty assignments and deployments. Prior to his retirement, Allan was the Chief Aircraft Maintenance Supervisor of the 37th Aircraft Maintenance Unit at Ellsworth AFB, SD.

While in the United States Air Force he earned his Federal Aviation Administration Airframe and Powerplant license and an Associates Degree in Applied Science from the Community College of the Air Force. After his Air Force retirement, He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Management from National American University 2010.

Allan and his wife Sandra were married July 26, 1986 in Dickinson, ND. Allan and Sandy have two daughters, Nichole Anne Holroyd and Nadine Lynn Gjerde. Both Daughters are South Dakota State University Graduates. Allan and Sandy, reside in Rapid City.



Pennington County VSOs (L to R) Allan Taylor, Thomas Vallette and David Dodson.

147TH ARMY BAND PARTICIPATES IN PARTNER STATE CELEBRATION

Members of South Dakota Army National Guard's 147th Army Band traveled to South America to participate in a musical performance event series with its state partnership country of Suriname, Nov. 18 - Dec. 1.

About 35 147th members conducted professional development training with the Suriname Army Band and played at a variety of events in support of community and public outreach objectives.

The musical events culminated with both groups marching together during Suriname's National Day Parade. The overall goal of the event was to further enhance the Suriname and SDNG partnership in support of US Southern Command cooperation objectives.

The band traveled from their home station of Mitchell to Sioux Falls to meet a West Virginia Air National Guard C-17 Globemaster cargo aircraft for the trip to Paramaribo.

Upon arrival, the 147th and the Suriname Army Band practiced together for four days prior to the National Day Parade. The practices included learning new music, integrating the two bands into one and marching. The soldiers of the 147th learned to play Surinamese music, as well as marching style and commands in a few short days.

Suriname has, in recent years, moved the parade from the capital of Paramaribo to other communities to allow more people to attend. This year, the parade was held in Saramacca, a district west of the capital.

The entire parade route was lined with onlookers, vendors and media.

"It was amazing to see how many people came (to the parade)," said Spc. Brooke Bigge, member of the 147th.

The President of Suriname, Desiré Bouterse, attended the National Day Parade, as well as senior leaders of the Suriname Defense Force, and dignitaries from Brazil, Guiana, French Guiana and the South Dakota National Guard. Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general, Brig. Gen. Russ Walz, assistant adjutant general for South Dakota's Air National Guard, and Command Sgt. Maj. James Hoekman were among the dignitaries viewing from the grandstand.

Members of the 147th also performed at multiple venues outside of the parade. Music performance teams performed at the United States Embassy, a local shopping mall, two children's homes, and several other locations. These performances were the highlight of the trip for many members of the band.

"Watching the kids sing along, and get up and dance was heartwarming," said 1st Sgt. Kristin Sokup, 147th senior noncommissioned officer. "They knew most of the (popular) songs we played, despite the songs being American."



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147TH ARMY BAND PARTICIPATES IN PARTNER STATE CELEBRATION (CONTINUED)

Other members of the band had similar experiences.

"Whether it was us, the 147th playing, or the Suriname band, those concerts were really impressive," said Spc. Jordan Hoffman.

Crowds were very receptive to the bands, as were the local musicians. Local musicians frequently joined in playing with members of the band.

"Playing with the Surinamese musicians was a lot of fun," said Spc. Craig Kolasch, with the 147th. "We were able to jam with them - they do a lot of freestyling."

"Overall, it was a very worthwhile trip," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Terry Beckler, 147th commander. "An annual training like this is a once in a lifetime opportunity."





Please Join Us For An Introduction to Whole Health

What is VA Black Hills Offering?

- This Introduction to Whole Health session is designed to introduce all Veterans to the VA Whole Health approach to care.
- Our number one goal is that you accomplish the mission you create for yourself.
- Through our programs and services and, most importantly, your own strengths and abilities, we will work together in healing partnership to optimize your well-being with a focus on what is important to YOU.
- Transitioning from the Service and life changes can pose unique challenges and opportunities. We'll discuss why a whole health approach is helpful in meeting these challenges and capitalizing on your opportunities.
- We'll also describe areas of self-care and well-being that make up all the different aspects of who we are as individuals.



What is Whole Health?

- Whole Health recognizes you as a whole person and helps support your unique answer to the question, "What would you do if your health were the best it could be?"
- Whole Health goes beyond your illnesses, injuries, or disabilities.
- It focuses on your values and aspiration, your health and well-being and may include self-care and complementary therapies (such as acupuncture, tai chi, and yoga), along with your conventional medical care.
- In Whole Health care, you are a more active partner with your health team.

Join us to learn more! Attend one of these free 2019 drop-in classes:

Ft Meade VA Medical Center

TUE: Jan 8, Feb 12, March 12
1:00p.m. to 3:00p.m.

Main Hospital, Bldg 145, Rm 239
Near Prosthetics

Hot Springs VA Medical Center

TUE: Jan 22, Feb 26, March 26
10:00a.m. to 12:00p.m.

Main Hospital, Bldg 12, Rm A002,
Primary Care

For questions and more information contact:

Jennifer Cichosz 605-347-2511 Ext 7652 or
Tina Belisle 605-745-2821



UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec 14—SD Army National Guard Deployment Ceremony—Building 802 at Camp Rapid—Rapid City—11:00 am (MT)
Dec 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—VFW—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Dec 15—Wreaths Across America Ceremony—Hot Springs National Cemetery (401 N. 4th Street)—10:00 am (MT)
Dec 15—Wreaths Across America Ceremony—Black Hills National Cemetery (20901 Pleasant Valley Drive—10:00 am (MT)
Dec 15—SD Army National Guard Deployment Ceremony—Yankton High School—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 24-25—State Offices Closed
Dec 31—Jan 1—State Offices Closed
Jan 8—Governor's State of the State—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
Jan 8—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)
Jan 13-18—VFW Accredited Service Officer Training—Annapolis, MD
Jan 18—Sioux Falls Military Appreciation Resource Fair—Central Church (Ralph Rogers Road) 10:00 am—9:00 pm (CT)
Jan 20—VFW Baseball Annual Meeting—Madison VFW Post Home—10:00 am (CT)
Jan 22—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)
Jan 28-29—VFW State Legislative Conference—Pierre
Jan 28—VFW State Legislative Reception—Pierre
Feb 2—USS South Dakota Commissioning
Feb 6—American Legion Legislative Reception—Post 8—Pierre—5:00 to 8:00 pm (CT)
Feb 8-10—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish
Feb 12—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)
Feb 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)
Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC
Mar 12—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)
Mar 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)
July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL



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South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>

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